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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000501

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KV](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIA REMAINS UNCOMPROMISING ON KOSOVO ILLEGALITY

REF: A. MOSCOW 462  
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 445

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Russia continued to send an uncompromising message on the illegality of Kosovo's independence and the irresponsibility of international recognition outside a framework of a negotiated solution, with the MFA reacting furiously to former Ambassador Holbrooke's alleged assertion of Russian support for the Belgrade demonstrations. FM Lavrov continues to publicly denounce the EU mission as unilateral and unsanctioned, with senior officials persisting in accusing the West of making an "historic mistake," and Russian NATO Ambassador Rogozin flirting with the necessity of "use of force" in the event the UN is a discredited institution. Mixed messages on Russia's next steps towards the frozen conflicts continue, with tensions heightened by the frequent visits of Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders. Concern of Kosovo's implications (and Russia's possible response) has helped create a facade of unity at the usually lackluster CIS Informal Summit. The Serbian Embassy in Moscow contacted us to convey their apologies for the destruction in Belgrade. In Moscow, law enforcement authorities told us that they were unaware of any planned demonstrations outside U.S. diplomatic premises. End Summary.

End Summary.

Reactions to Riots in Belgrade

[1](#)2. (SBU) While Russia supported the unanimous UNSC statement on February 21 condemning the Belgrade attacks on foreign missions, today's MFA reaction was focused on a statement by former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, which alleged Moscow backing for the Belgrade riots. MFA Spokesman Kaminin labeled Holbrooke's comments "absolutely inappropriate" and an act of "placing blame at someone else's door." Calling the riots in Belgrade "regrettable," the MFA emphasized that the forces which recognized Kosovo "should have realized the effect of the move," including experienced Balkan hands such as Holbrooke. Speaker of the Federation Council Mironov dismissed the accusation, while underscoring Serbia's overall diplomatic response to the crisis. Serbian DCM Kurjak, who is closely allied with President Tadic, called us today to apologize for the destruction at our embassy in Belgrade.

Reacting to EULUX

[1](#)3. (SBU) Russia has hewed to its uncompromising position on the illegality of Kosovo's independence, with FM Lavrov using a recent press conference to underscore the "bitter irony" of the EU deploying a mission to Kosovo "unilaterally and without the sanction of the UNSC" with the goal of "ensuring the supremacy of the law." A further MFA statement charged that the EU mission did not conform to the "principles of

interactions" in the Russia-EU roadmap for external security, which were premised on increasing the authority of the UN. The statement accused the EU of aiding in destabilizing the Balkans and "encouraging separatism around the world." Presidential Special Representative on EU-Russian Relations Yastrzhembskiy likewise accused the EU of "opening Pandora's box," predicting an increase in separatist struggles in European countries. He warned that recognition of Kosovo's independence "counter to international law and the United Nations" would harm relations between Russia and the EU.

#### Political Establishment Closes Ranks

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14. (C) A wide range of political and social leaders continued to protest Kosovo's declaration of independence and Western recognition:

-- In separate meetings with the Ambassador (septel), First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov and liberal opposition political leader Grigoriy Yavlinskiy characterized U.S. support for Kosovo's independence as a "historic mistake."

-- Head of the Duma's International Relations Committee Kosachev repeated claims that Kosovo's independence provided a glimpse of a "new world order," where strong nations did not need the permission of international law to achieve their objectives, but could "compel" the international community to legitimize their goals. In a meeting with the UK Ambassador today, Kosachev maintained that Western policy had "destroyed" the UN, with no motivation for anyone to respect the UNSC or to work for consensus.

-- In a DVC press conference from Brussels, Russian

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Ambassador to NATO Rogozin provocatively flirted with the Russian use of force, noting ambiguously that "if these organizations (i.e., the EU and NATO) step beyond their mandate in Kosovo, these organizations will be in conflict with the UN, and then I think we will also begin operating under the assumption that in order to be respected, one needs to use force."

-- Putin's Deputy Press secretary Peskov insisted that Kosovo was "not unique," and said the United States and Russia would have to discuss the issue because the "first signs of a chain reaction" were already appearing.

-- MFA Balkans Special Envoy Botsan-Kharchenko predicted that the situation could lead to the isolation of the Kosovar Serbs, resulting in Kosovo being divided into two.

-- Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksey II called Kosovo's DI an "anti-historic event" that "could upset the global balance." He claimed that "a tremendous number" of Orthodox churches and monasteries "were and are being destroyed" in Kosovo.

#### Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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15. (C) Russia continues to send mixed messages on how it intends to treat Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the wake of Kosovo's independence. South Ossetia "president" Kokoity said the frozen conflict leaders were not deterred by Kosachev's statement that Russia would "never" recognize their independence, and in his meeting with the UK Ambassador Kosachev charged that "after Kosovo, we have less reason not to." Federation Council International Relations Chairman Margelov told the Ambassador that Russia would work on two tracks: to successfully negotiate a solution to the Transnistria standoff and to adopt a "Taiwan" model of engagement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

16. (SBU) Helping to ratchet up tensions has been the

heightened pace of diplomatic engagement with the leadership from the frozen conflicts. After visits by the "foreign ministers" and then the "presidents" last week, the "foreign ministers" of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria met in Moscow on Friday, with the leaders of the republics slated to gather again in Moscow within two weeks. The press reported that Abkhaz "president" Bagapsh and Kokoity were preparing an appeal to Russia, the CIS, and the United Nations to recognize their independence in "the next few days." Kokoity said on February 20 that "some states may start the process of official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia this year, and Russia does not need to be the first to do so."

¶6. (SBU) While we do not have a readout of the February 21 bilaterals at the CIS informal summit (which is still going on), tensions generated by Kosovo's independence has resulted in at least a facade of unity for the usually fractious and lackluster body. No CIS member state has recognized Kosovo, and several -- Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan -- have joined Russia in publicly refusing to do so. All of the member states, experts stress, have vested interests in maintaining the sanctity of their post-Soviet borders, and Russia so far has been able to use the Summit to present a unified front on a group defined more by its differences.

#### U.S. Mission Security

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¶7. (SBU) Following events in Belgrade, the U.S. Embassy and three consulates have reviewed their security posture and preparations in case of large, uncontrolled demonstrations. RSO contacted multiple law enforcement agencies, none of which had any information on planned demonstrations at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Russia. There have been no protests at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Russia over the past three days.

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